

Money matters

College offers courses to help get finances on track

by **Beth Kristin Ott**
assistant editor

How to make more money and hang on to what you've got is a matter on many people's minds these days.

Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale is reaching out to address the concerns of local residents through a variety of courses on financial topics.

"It's part of our mission as a college to offer community education," said Maria Reyes, associate dean for occupational education.

The community has responded affirmatively to the offerings. The school's Learning for Life program has provided courses on everything from knitting to photography.

At a time when the unemployment rate is soaring and families are feeling a crunch on their monthly budgets, the college is responding.

West Valley residents looking to be more financially savvy have a variety of short-term classes to choose from this fall. Courses include debt elimination, investing, money management, annuities, home buying and basic personal finances.

"We always try to get a sense of what our community members are interested in," Reyes said. "People are looking for information on how to use their money and move forward."

Estrella Mountain has always offered some financial classes; however, the topics have changed and the number of sessions has increased. The additions of home-buying and debt elimination classes are a sign of the times, Reyes said.

Knowledge is power

Jim McDonald, a financial adviser for Edward Jones in Avondale, teaches at the college on a regular basis. One of his popular classes teaches the basics of investing.

"It's very general. It starts with, this is a CD, this is a bond, mutual funds, etc.," he said. "I've gotten a lot of good feedback on that course."

McDonald, who has taught at the college for about five years, also offers a class on annuities.

"Annuities have a very old sort of stigma attached. So, I go through the facts, the options and what I think about each," he said.

In his classes, McDonald teaches what he knows from experience as a financial adviser, and will share opinions and even give personal portfolio advice when requested, he said.

"The college is a great, neutral setting," McDonald said. "I do no sales presentations. It's purely informational."

His classes help people to balance their investment portfolios. The instructor helps people assess their risk-tolerance level so they can see how their actual investment choices match.

"You may find you need to be more conservative, and yet you are in some high-risk investments, or vice versa," he said.

It's all about gaining knowledge to make informed financial decisions, he said.

"Educated people make better decisions," he said. "Education makes people feel less helpless. You can watch the news and understand what they are talking about."

The community education classes are open to anyone and geared toward all ages and income levels.

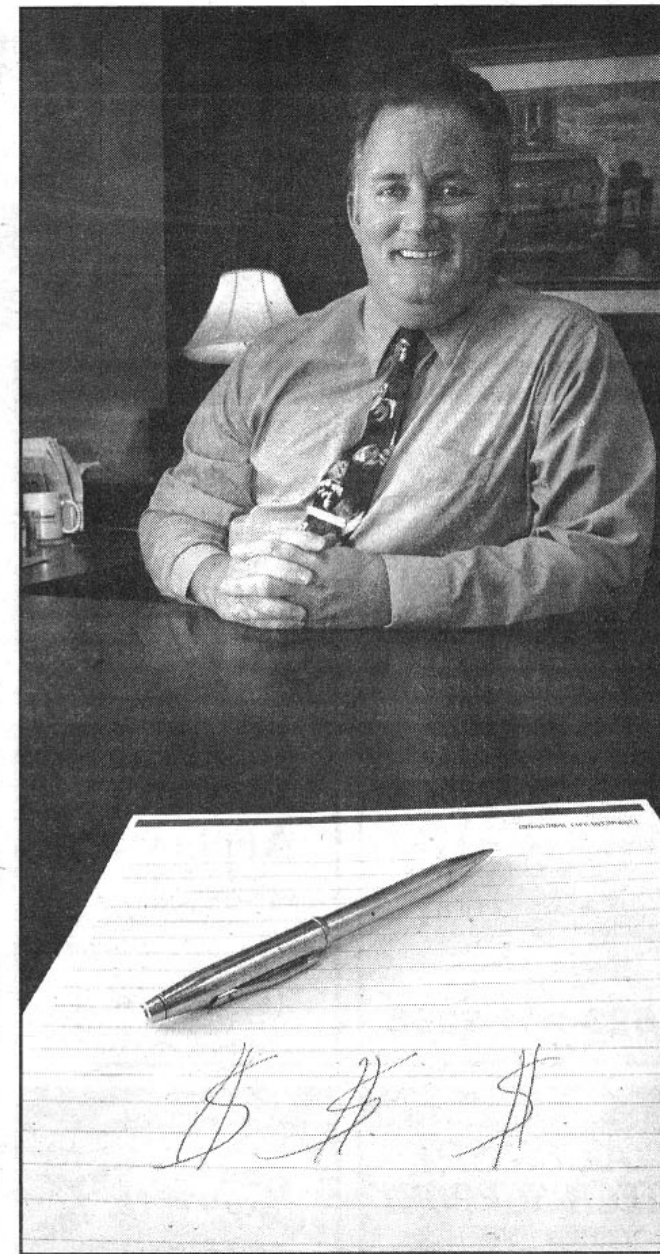
"The bulk of the people I am seeing are working investors, in their 40s and 50s, some in their 30s," McDonald said. "It's just as important for retirees, though."

College enrollment continues to increase as residents seek ways to increase their job skills or make a career change.

"Our enrollment is increasing day by day," Reyes said. "It's a pleasure to see the students each day waiting to get advisement and enroll. A lot of people are investigating new options and anticipating changes in their careers."

To find the Learning for Life class listings, go to www.estrellamountain.edu and under Find a Class, search Comm_Ed. The college is at Dysart and Thomas roads in Avondale. Call 623-935-8000 for information.

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View photo by Michael Claws

EDWARD JONES financial adviser Jim McDonald sits in his Avondale office July 30 before one of his finance classes at Estrella Mountain Community College. McDonald will be teaching students how to manage their money and maybe make some in the process.